

Good afternoon!

My name is Jill Underly, and I am the District Administrator of the Pecatonica Area School District.

Linda Brown, the first plaintiff named in the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court Case in 1954 passed away right before Easter. And as I reflected on that case while I prepared for our presentation to you today - I thought about her, her legacy. I thought about all the issues at the heart of that **Civil Rights** case, race, social-class, geography, but above all - the equity of OPPORTUNITY.

An issue that greatly impacts our financial bottom line is open enrollment and the movement of teachers and families, considering we are a rural school district very close to the Madison Metro area. I always ask parents why they leave and I always ask our teachers who do the same. It never is that they don't like working or attending school here. They always say that they have a favorable opinion of Pecatonica. But they leave because they say, "Oh, Pecatonica doesn't have the same technology offerings as this other school, or the library or the science labs are just so much better at the other school." One teacher, a great teacher, left last year after 5 years at Pecatonica and went to a suburban school district because she was able to only have to teach one subject instead of four different ones. Teachers are people too, with lives, families, and yet, because they teach in rural schools we have different expectations for them.

I bring all of this up because 60 years after the Brown decision, school segregation still exists. It may not be based on race, necessarily, but it is still to much extent based on income inequality. When you think about where black or latino students in Wisconsin attend schools, there are some similarities between urban and rural. When you think about where the wealthy send their children to school, vs. those who aren't --- there are definitely similarities to the Brown Decision. Our schools are separate. Our schools in Wisconsin are unequal.

You are going to hear some stories this afternoon from our group of rural school superintendents. Above all, EVERY parent --- regardless of where they live, want the best for their children. Public schools, a cornerstone of our democracy was supposed to equalize opportunity. It shouldn't matter where you go to school, but in Wisconsin,

let's be honest, it DOES matter.

Teachers and parents see this in the facilities, or in the price and experience level of our staff, or in the types of course offerings we have, or how overworked our administrators or school counselors are.

When our population shrinks and our costs keep surging, we have to make our dollars stretch a lot farther. We have to make tough decisions or cuts, or sometimes we simply aren't as innovative as our wealthier neighbors are because we have to choose between wants and absolute needs..

**I want you to place these stories in the lens of “Brown.” I’m curious as you hear my stories as well as the others to follow, if you think that there is no segregation in Wisconsin schools due to our current funding formula.**

- Pecatonica has passed a recurring referendum every 4 to 5 years since 2000. We do this to keep up with increases in operating costs, like salary, or building maintenance.
- But that money for operating costs --- just keeps the lights on. It doesn't allow us to “innovate” or invest in education like we need to because it has CHANGED in the past 25 years. Think about all the changes we've witnessed. And I have colleagues who will illustrate this point further - but keep in mind that our current funding formula restricts innovation in rural school districts because we are locked in at spending levels. It doesn't allow us to keep up pace on educational innovations or changes, or mandates without making cuts somewhere else.
- Our current funding formula reinforces the notion that rural kids deserve less. Our current funding formula tells our rural students that they don't deserve a dedicated gifted and talented coordinator, or a math specialist, or a tech-ed wing with state of the art equipment that will make them attractive to future employers or colleges.
- At Pecatonica and most other rural school district: we don't have those 21st century learning environments: the temperature controlled classrooms, by the way, which has proven to show that kids who take tests in 90 degree classrooms will perform lower than their peers who take the assessments in the 74 degree classrooms. Would you teach better in 74 degrees, and would you

learn better in a temperature and humidity controlled classroom? INSTEAD we tell our kids and staff that they are accountable for and judged on those assessments that they are not taking under the same conditions as other students in school districts whose community members have more money.

**So tell me, who deserves Innovation? Do you deserve these things because you choose to live somewhere other than Pecatonica? Or Potosi? Or Prairie Du Chien? Or maybe you don't deserve innovation because you live on a farm. Or perhaps you don't deserve these things because you attend a school that is already consolidated? Or maybe you are undeserving because your house isn't worth as much or that because you live on acres instead of a city lot.**

In January 2018, the Office of Civil Rights released a report. I sincerely hope you read it, because if not, it should be required reading as you look to fix this funding formula. **The main finding was that the “vast funding inequities are a significant factor in rendering education available to public school students PROFOUNDLY UNEQUAL. Folks, this is not 1954. This is 2018.**

We all have a fundamental belief that that public education is the ticket to equalizing LIFE OPPORTUNITY, regardless of where you live, your race, your economic status, or life circumstance ----- How do I tell a child just because she lives in Hollandale on a farm, or in a cheese factory, or in the village, that just because she grows up here and not in New Berlin, or Shorewood, that her opportunity isn't as valued by the State? How do I argue with the parent who wants to open enroll their child out to a school that can provide these innovations? When a funding formula exists that exasperates these differences, you have to conclude that it is not a local issue or a poverty issue, or a rural issue --- it is a Civil Rights issue.

Revise this funding formula. Take a look at how the gap between the have and have not school districts has WIDENED these past 25 years. Please give us the opportunity to provide innovative 21st century curriculum, facilities, and technology to children. It's not only an economic imperative, it's a civil rights imperative, and it's our responsibility as a public school system. THANK YOU for listening to me.